

Message Text

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SUBJECT: ICRC AND ARC ASSISTANCE TO REFUGEES IN THAILAND

REFERENCE: STATE 026385

1. IN MEETING WITH AMBASSADOR FEBRUARY 11, LOCAL ICRC DELEGATE ZEN RUFFINEN, AND REGIONAL DIRECTOR PASQUIER, ASKED IF THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT COULD ASSIST THE ICRC'S PROGRAMS IN THAILAND IN SUPPORT OF REFUGEES. THE AMBASSADOR SUGGESTED THAT THIS QUESTION BE TAKEN UP IN WASHINGTON AND THAT HE DID NOT KNOW IF ANY EMERGENCY FUNDS FOR THIS PURPOSE COULD BE MADE AVAILABLE.

2. SINCE RECEIPT OF REFTTEL WE HAVE BEEN PONDERING THE QUESTION OF DIRECT USG ASSISTANCE TO THE ICRC. ICRC THAILAND HAS TWO CHIEF REFUGEE PROGRAMS. ONE IS THEIR MASTER REGISTRATION LIST OF REFUGEES WHICH IS USEFUL TO US AND OTHERS FOR LOCATOR PURPOSES. THUS FAR WE ARE NOT CONVINCED THAT THIS IS NOT WITHOUT OPERATIONAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE PROBLEMS OR THAT THIS FACET OF THE PROGRAM IS SO COSTLY THAT IT REQUIRES A USG CONTRIBUTION. ICRC BANGKOK WILL BE PROVIDING A BUDGET BREAKOUT NEXT WEEK.

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3. THE OTHER MAIN AREA OF ACTIVITY IS IN MEDICAL

SUPPORT TO THE REFUGEE CAMPS VIA THE THAI RED CROSS. THE ICRC SAYS THAT IT REQUIRES FUNDS TO KEEP THIS PROGRAM AT THE PRESENT LEVEL. THE PROBLEM LIES IN DETERMINING THE ACTUAL LEVEL OF EXISTING PROGRAMS. WE ARE ONLY AWARE OF ONE OR TWO CAMPS IN WHICH THERE IS REGULAR MEDICAL TREATMENT AT LEAST SEVERAL DAYS PER WEEK ALTHOUGH OTHER LESS INTENSIVE EFFORTS ARE BEING MADE AT SOME BUT NOT ALL REFUGEE CAMPS. AT ARANYAPRATHET CAMP, THIS EFFORT INVOLVES THAI RED CROSS NURSES. TO BE FULLY EFFECTIVE THIS TEAM REQUIRES A DOCTOR TO ADMINISTER MORE THAN ROUTINE MEDICATION. IN FACT, THE ICRC/THAI RED CROSS DO NOT HAVE DOCTORS WORKING IN THE CAMPS EACH TIME A CLINIC IS HELD, BUT RATHER ONLY ON INFREQUENT OCCASIONS. AT THE SAME TIME MEDICAL SUPPLIES AND A FEW DOCTORS ARE MADE AVAILABLE BY VARIOUS PRIVATE VOLUNTARY AGENCIES. MORE SUCH ASSISTANCE CAN BE EXPECTED IN THE FUTURE.

4. A CASE IN POINT IS THE INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE WHICH AT PRESENT HAS A TWO-MAN TEAM IN THAILAND EXAMINING THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAY TO PROVIDE PHYSICAL AND MEDICAL SUPPLIES. THE ICRC THUS FAR HAS NOT SHOWN GREAT INTEREST IN MAKING USE OF THIS OFFER OF ASSISTANCE CHIEFLY ON THE GROUNDS THAT THE THAI RED CROSS MIGHT OBJECT. WE ARE ASKING FOR CLARIFICATION OF THE THAI RED CROSS POSITION. IF, IN FACT, THE ICRC/THAI RED CROSS ARE NOT AMENABLE TO PRIVATE US VOLUNTARY AGENCY ASSISTANCE, IT MAY NOT BE APPROPRIATE TO PROVIDE A USG CONTRIBUTION TO ICRC MEDICAL WORK.

5. THE FIRST STEPS ARE BEING TAKEN IN BANGKOK TO BETTER COORDINATE MEDICAL ASSISTANCE FROM ABROAD IN THE FORM OF DOCTORS AND MEDICINES. THE LEAD ON THIS COORDINATION COMES FROM A COORDINATING BOARD OF VOLAG REPRESENTATIVES AND NOT FROM THE ICRC/THAI RED CROSS. THE CASE FOR ASSISTANCE TO ICRC IN THE MEDICAL AREA WOULD BE FAR STRONGER IF THEY ACTED AS THE CONDUIT AND MANAGER FOR THE DISPARATE ELEMENTS NOW AT WORK IN REFUGEE CAMPS HERE. THE ICRC DOES SAY THAT USG FUNDING MIGHT PERMIT THEM TO ASSUME THIS COORDINATIVE ROLE. HOWEVER, THIS IS A MATTER OF CONJECTURE AND PRESENT TRENDS HERE ARE FOR THE VOLAGS TO LEAD LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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COORDINATION WITH THE ICRC/THAI RED CROSS ONLY ONE OF SEVERAL PLAYERS IN THE MEDICAL ASSISTANCE FIELD.

6. IT IS CERTAINLY IN OUR INTEREST FOR THE ICRC TO MAINTAIN ITS PRESENT LEVEL OF ACTIVITY BOTH IN THE LOCATOR AND MEDICAL FIELDS. A USG CONTRIBUTION COULD FOCUS ON MAINTAINING ONE OR TWO ICRC STAFF SALARIES HERE IN BANGKOK. ONE FACTOR THAT BEARS ON THE QUESTION OF

SUPPORTING ICRC IS THAT AS MUCH AS \$1 MILLION IS BUDGETED FOR REPATRIATION OF PAKISTANI, INDIAN AND YEMENITE NATIONALS FROM SAIGON TO THEIR HOME COUNTRIES. THIS DOES NOT APPEAR TO US TO BE A MATTER OF PRIORITY FOR USG FUNDING. IN FACT, WE RECOMMEND THAT IF FUNDING IS CONTEMPLATED THAT WE EXCLUDE THIS PARTICULAR ENDEAVOR FROM USG SUPPORT.

7. IN LIGHT OF ALL OF THE ABOVE EMBASSY RECOMMENDS DEFERRING APPROVAL OF A CONTRIBUTION TO THE ICRC AT THIS TIME. IF ADDITIONAL INFORMATION COMES TO LIGHT WHICH MAKES FUNDING SEEM MORE COMPELLING, WE WILL BRING IT TO THE DEPARTMENT'S ATTENTION. IN ANY EVENT WE WILL BE CABLING THE ICRC BUDGET AND PROJECTIONS FOR NEXT SEVERAL MONTHS.

8. WE HAVE JUST LEARNED PERTINENT TO THE ABOVE THAT THE UNHCR HAS MADE AVAILABLE TWO MILLION BAHTS (\$100,000) TO THE THAI RED CROSS FOR MEDICAL SUPPLIES.
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